

THE
Standing and Responsibility
OF
"DEAR CHILDREN."

BY J. N. D.

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“As Dear Children.”



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EPHESIANS V. 1.

IN this epistle, as in others also, we have first the unfolding of the truth of God in a *doctrinal* way, and then *exhortations* as to the practical ways of the people of God, founded *on* that doctrine, and taking their *character* from the character of the truth presented doctrinally in the previous chapters. This epistle presents, in the fullest way of all, the place and standing into which the grace of God brings the Christian; and the exhortations which follow correspond with this, and give us in its highest character what God looks for as to the walk of those whom He has set in such a place. A Christian is looked at in scripture in two ways: on the one hand he is regarded as in Christ Jesus.

sitting "in the heavenly places;" and on the other, as walking down here upon the earth. The latter of these two aspects is the one in which the believer is regarded in the Epistle to the Romans; and so, as down here on earth, he is besought to present his body "a living sacrifice" to God. In Colossians he is again looked at as down here, but *dead* to the world, and not "living to the world," but "risen with Christ." Still nothing about being seated in Him in the heavenly places. *He* is there, and we are told to seek the things that are there. Here, however, in Ephesians, we are seen as *put* in heaven; our place is there *now*, and the exhortations we have flow from that. We are to live as those that have, as it were, *come forth* from that place to manifest in the world the God we have learnt there. We have both sides of the truth in 2 Corinthians, and there we are called "the *epistle* of Christ." We are here to represent Christ; and the world now should read what God is *in us*, as

once His law was to be read on the two stone tables.

Now in this portion there are three principal things shewn as characterising the state, subjectively, of the Christian. The first is, that the *truth* as it is in Jesus, is, that I *have* put off the old man, and I *have* put on the new. The next is, that I am sealed by the Holy Ghost for the day of redemption; and the third is, that I am brought into relationship with God as a *child*—a "dear" child.

Looked at as "in Christ," I *have* put off the old man—have done with Adam, and "the flesh"—as to my standing before God, and I have got Christ instead. Then we have the Holy Ghost dwelling in us, the seal from God of the perfectness of that work which has cleansed me before God. These two things characterise my *state*: I am in Christ, and the Holy Ghost is in me. And then the *object*, by which I am to be characterised, such being the case, is God Himself. He has in Christ "for-

given you ;" you go and do the same, *as* He hath forgiven you ; " be ye, therefore, followers [or imitators] of God as dear children."

Such is our responsibility to thus represent God, who is *love*, and who has so dealt with us. And then God is *light* too—the only two things He is said to be essentially—"Love" and "Light." He is righteous and almighty, and has many other attributes, but is never said to *be* righteousness, or almightiness, &c. Love and light He *is*. We have seen what He says about our following Him as love ; and then, as to light, he says, "Walk as children of *light*." Light is absolute in its purity — mixes with nothing — manifests everything that is not itself. Well, God *is* light, and love too, and I am to imitate Him. How can *I* imitate God ? a poor thing of flesh and blood, and with sin in me ! I imitate God ? Yes, for it is in a *Man* He has been manifested. Jesus was *God* in a *Man*, and that Man is my model and standard, and God gives me

no lower one. He is your example—walk as *He* walked.

But this is not to get *into* the place of being a child. It supposes you *are* in the place of being God's dear children, and that you know it. Now, go and glorify Him as *you* know Him, and according to all you know Him to be. I cannot *be* a follower of God, except as being a dear child, and knowing it too. The duty is according to the place I am in, and flows from it; and my living in the consciousness of the place is the only way by which I can properly fulfil the duties that belong to that place. The relationship itself forms and determines the duty, but I must have the sense of it to enable me to act according to the truth of it. Any of the common relationships of life will illustrate this. Take a child with his father: his duties are those of a child, but if he does not know himself a child, he will not have affections or character suited to a child. He may slave away at *servicing* his father, but if he does not

know him as his father, all is out of place. So with a wife, or with a servant. Suppose I were to expect all of you to act as if you were my servants—you would say, "He has gone out of his mind;" and rightly too. But if you *were* my servants, all would be different—the duty pertaining to the relationship would be there. Now, grace has *made* me a dear child of God, and my responsibility is to walk *as* one, not to fulfil certain duties in order to *be* one. People say, If my place with God is not dependent upon my behaviour, it gives freedom to my own will to do as I like. But it is all a mistake, and one that no body would think of making in the common relationships of life. Would you say to your child, Now, you are my child, and you can never be any other than my child; now then, of course, you can do as you like? Certainly not. The relationship is *not* dependent on the conduct, but the duty flows from the relationship that is already there. So here, God *has* made

us His children, and now sets us to follow Him *as* dear children.

As to the question of what I *was*—my *sins* as a responsible child of the first Adam—grace has entirely closed the question, and I am *saved*. I am no longer in that place before God at all, but in a new place, and standing in Christ, the Last Adam; and my duties now are all according to that *new* place He has given me. I had responsibilities, of course, as a *man*, as it says here, "For which thing's sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience." And the law was the perfect rule and measure of those responsibilities; but upon that ground all was *lost*. It did not offer any *remedy* at all. It was like going to a man, and saying, You must mind and not get into debt, live within your income, and mind how you spend your money. But he says I *am* in debt to a fearful amount, and have nothing to pay with: and as to minding how I spend my money, I have not a single bit of money to spend.

Now, when Jesus came into the world, it was not to tell him not to get into debt, but to *pay* the debt—it was to *bring* us something—*salvation*, the very thing we needed, for we were *lost*. He "came to seek and to save the *lost*." Not that it might turn out at the *day of judgment* that I was lost, but lost *already* — "to save that which *was* lost." Christianity comes upon this ground distinctly. Law did *not*—it promised life upon the ground of its requirements being met. But on *that* principle we are all lost. We have *not* loved God with all our heart. *You* have not loved God with all your heart to-day, nor your neighbour as yourself. I do not ask whether you may be a kind neighbour; if you heard your neighbour's fortune was gone, you would *feel* for him. But if you heard your own was gone, you would feel *more*. We *do not* love our neighbour as ourselves, yet this is what the law required. Not that it enjoined any *new* duties: nothing was required under the law that was not due before,

only it brought in the *authority* of God as the One who had a right to command, and a claim to be obeyed. But it was given to persons who were *already* sinners—a rule to a sinner not to sin! He *does* sin, then he is *lost*; the law condemns him, and brings no remedy. Sin by the law becomes “exceeding sinful”—“by the law is the knowledge of *sin*.” Observe, it is not sins only, but *sin*; I learn that the *root* and all is bad. There are many things we call crimes, such as theft, or murder, or the like, which our natural conscience condemns without any law; but the law says, Thou shalt not *lust*. Not only you must not *do* what is wrong, but you must not *want* to do it. But I *do* lust—then I am under condemnation, the curse of the law I have broken.

Now the work of Christ puts a *seal* on all this, for He was *made* a curse. It was not exacting the debt in righteousness, but *paying* it in grace. Still, it owns and honours the *claim*. If I go to a man about a debt of a thousand

pounds, and tell him he must *pay* it—I admit that he *owes* it. If I go to him, and tell him I have paid it for him, I equally admit his debt of the whole sum, but it is an exactly opposite way of dealing with regard to that debt. And this last is how God is now dealing with sinners, not *requiring* righteousness, but *bringing* grace and salvation. Even when Jesus was here it was *grace* to man. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," and what He was doing was not to charge people's sins upon them, still less to judge them for them. "God was in Christ, not imputing trespasses." It is true man would not have Him come thus in grace. But even that did not stop God in His purposes of love. The cross was the end of Christ being down here, as far as man was concerned; but that very cross God accepted (that is, the work accomplished there) as putting away the sin that came out perfectly there. And now God takes the place in grace of *beseeking* man to come, on the ground of that

blood which has perfectly glorified God, and has settled for ever the question of good and evil. What could God do with Adam and Eve—with a world of sinners? If He destroy them all, where were the display of Himself as love? If He spare them all, what becomes of His holiness and His righteous claim on man? It would be indifference to sin, and that cannot be with God. But the cross settles it all. Every principle of good and of evil meets in the cross. On the side of evil there was the power of Satan, the “prince of this world,” come—had nothing in Christ, it is true—but he came. It was the hour of “the power of darkness.” Then all the sin of man’s heart came out, and hatred to Him who had been with them in grace. And Christ, too, the holy and sinless Victim, *made sin* for us; taking the place before God of *sin*, and to be dealt with as such. But what is He in all this? Perfect love to His Father —“That the world may know that I love the Father.” Perfect

obedience too—"As the Father gave me commandment, even so I do." Perfect every way—the perfect Man, yet put in the place of sin, and meeting there all that God is as the Judge of sin. And what is there like the cross for shewing out what God is? Perfect righteousness, manifested and executed against *sin*, and this in perfect love to the sinner! The absolute (I would hardly say "perfect") evil of man comes out in the very place where the perfect love of God is shewn. Every attribute of God is glorious in the cross, and the result is that man, in the person of Christ, is in "the glory of God." Such is the place of man according to the counsels of God, and Christ as man is there. And He is there as "Fore-runner for us," because *we* are going there too. The work which fits us to be there is already done. People speak sometimes as if some work were going on which is to fit us for the presence of God; but it is a mistake entirely. Our apprehension of what we have may

deepen, as our practical conformity to the mind of God ought also to become more complete ; but as to our meetness for God's presence, it is already perfect on the ground of the work of Christ. The dying thief could be taken to paradise the same day ; and as to ourselves, it is said, “ Who *hath* made us meet” (or *fit*). It is *not* done, it never can be, but it is “ By one offering he *hath* perfected for ever them that are sanctified.” Perfected *by* God, and *for* the presence of God, according to all the nature of God as now fully revealed. God in Christ came down to man in all his sinfulness ; and man in Christ has gone up to God in His righteousness.

How do I *know* all this ? The Jew waits till the High Priest comes *out* to know that he went in, and was accepted. But we do *not*. We know of the perfect acceptance of Christ, and His work in heaven by the *Holy Ghost*, who *has* come out. Now I get my link with it all. Believing, through grace, in Christ.

I know that God *gave* Him in grace and *love*, and that He has accepted Him in *righteousness*. It was "one sacrifice," made in love and obedience, and owned and accepted of God; and the Holy Ghost come down from heaven, now that Jesus is glorified, gives me the consciousness of it, and of my place before God on the ground of it. As He said in John xiv. 20, "At that day ye shall *know* that I am in my Father [a Divine Person], and *ye in me*, and I in you." He was speaking of the day when the Spirit of Truth should be with us, and in us—*this day*, now that He gives us the knowledge that God has accepted the work and the One who did it, and that we are before God *in* the One who is thus accepted.

I have now a new place *in* Christ. Not only my sins put away, but a place before God in Him who has put them away. "*In Christ*," perfectly accepted before God on the ground of what *He is* and has done; and then the other side of the truth, not less true, or less im-

portant, He is *in me* to be manifested in my spirit and my ways in the world.

Such is the new place redemption gives us. It answers to the deliverance out of Egypt of the children of Israel. The Passover represents the cross. God was there dealing with sin as a *Judge*, and His people in the land were the most guilty of all, for they had the knowledge of the true God, yet were serving the gods of Egypt. But the blood of the lamb sheltered them, and God passèd over their houses. But there is more than this in redemption, though this, meeting the moral nature of God about sin, be the deeper thing, and the basis of all the rest. Still, at the Red Sea they could sing—could say, "Thou hast *led forth* the people whom thou hast redeemed." They had seen "the *salvation* of the Lord," had known God, not as a Judge only, but a *Saviour*, and they were free now, and out of Egypt. In Romans v. and viii. we have the two things true of ourselves which these types foreshadowed. In

chapter v. we have seen God dealing with the question of our *sins*, and settling it in the death and resurrection of Christ, so that we have "peace with God." But in chapter viii. another thing is seen, and that is, that a new *place* is given us "*in Christ*." "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are *in Christ Jesus*. Can be no such thing for them—it would be to condemn a part of Christ! So I have in Him an entire clearing away of all that was against me as a part of "the first Adam," but a new place before God now in the *second Man*, "the *last Adam*." He is now my life, "the *new man*" I have put on; and the Holy Ghost dwelling in me. All that was needed for cleansing me, and making me fit for God's presence, was fully accomplished at His *first coming*, and now I wait for His *second coming* to take me into His own glory. I am here between His first coming and His second. Looking back, it is His *cross* I see, the ground of all my blessing; looking for-

ward, it is His *glory*, and His coming to take me into it. My body is not redeemed yet, but at His coming it will be (Rom. viii. 23 ; Phil. iii. 21), and this is what I wait for. I want to be with Him as the poor man did who had been possessed with the “legion” (Mark v.), but He said, “Go home to thy friends, and tell them,” &c., and so He says to us. But we cannot have it too clearly in our minds that the *present* place of the believer is before God in Christ. Of old it was not so ; man was kept at a distance, and God did not reveal Himself. There was a veil up, which concealed God, and kept man out. The high priest yearly went in alone, as a figure of Christ, but the way was not open ; God did not come out, man could not go in. Now the veil is *rent*, God *has* come out to man, and man *is* gone in to God. And we have “boldness to *enter* into the holiest of all.” The leper of old, in the day of his cleansing, was washed with water, sprinkled with blood, and anointed with

oil. And so of believers; they are made clean by "the word" (the water), their hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience (the blood), and in those thus sanctified and cleansed the Holy Ghost dwells (the oil). The blood of Christ has made him clean before God, and he knows it by the Holy Ghost, who is a witness to the efficacy and perfection of Christ's work. He is now in Christ, and Christ is in him; he has, by the Holy Ghost, the consciousness of relationship with God, and says, "Abba, Father;" and the love of *God* too is shed abroad in his heart. Such is now my place with God, and now I am not a child of Adam at all, but a child of *God*. I *was* a child of Adam, but out of that condition I have *died* in the death of Christ. The "old man" is "put off," the new put on. And observe, the new man is said here to be created "after God." It is not innocence, as Adam. He was *not* created "after God," for he had not the knowledge of good and evil. God *had*, and

so, when man had fallen, He said, “the man is *become* as one of us.” But our new estate as in Christ is *not* innocence. the not knowing good and evil, any more than Adam’s condition was one of *holiness*. Colossians iii. tells us the new man is renewed in *knowledge* after the image of Him that created him. It is not that I have not the knowledge of good and evil. I have seen *sin*, and God’s estimate of it at the cross, and I know *righteousness* as it is in God. See, in John xvi., what the demonstration of righteousness is said to be. As to *sin*, there may be many details of it, and each his own sins, but the crowning proof of the world’s sin is its rejection of Christ. “Where is Abel, thy brother?” What have you done with Christ? But as to *righteousness*, Jesus said the Holy Ghost should bring demonstration of righteousness in that *He* went to the Father, and the world would see Him no more. I see in Christ’s being set at the right hand of God the display of righteousness, God’s

estimate of perfection. On the ground of what Christ has done He sits there, a Man in the glory of God. To be sure I am not there yet, but I am in Him who is there; "accepted in the beloved." And as down here I have Him for my life, and the Holy Ghost in me to be the power of that new life. The old put off, nothing now should be seen but what is of the new. John says, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God *dwelleth* in him, and he in God." What a blessed Guest! How have you treated Him to-day? If you had the Queen, or any other great personage, staying with you, would you not take great pains to have your house all in order, and worthy of such a guest? And *God* dwells in us by His Spirit! We are told not to *grieve* Him; and what is it that does grieve Him? All that is not suited to the presence and nature of God. It does not matter what the thing is in which I am serving God. It may be sweeping the streets, or looking after

the children, or my business. The question is, Am I doing the will of God, and in *obedience* to Him?

Before God I have the best place that grace can give me, and it is not for me to be calling it presumption to take it, or to be arranging for *myself* what place He must give me. The younger son in the parable did this, but it was when he had *not met* his father. It was in the far country he talked about being made as a hired servant, but when he gets back there is not a word about it. If I have offended you, and am thinking about how you will treat me, and so on, it is a clear proof I have not met you; if I *had*, I should *know*. When I have met God, I know what He is, and that He is all *for* me, and not against me. It is beautiful to see in that parable how, when the prodigal has come to the confession of his sin, with his father on his neck, there is not a word more about him. The father does it all! *He* calls for the best robe and the fatted calf, and orders everything according to his own

love. He had met the prodigal in his rags, but he would not bring him into the house so. He must have the "best robe" on—quite a new thing for him, no part of the substance he had divided between them, but the treasures of his house brought forth, and all that could testify his delight at having his son back. He calls him his *son*; except once when trying to win his elder brother to come and share his joy (*he* represented the Pharisees, and you cannot win Pharisees—they murmur): he then called him "thy brother," but otherwise, "*my* son," and it was the place and honour of his son that he gave him. Do you *believe* that God is happy in having you brought back to Him? Why, it is the very point in all the three parables. Who was happy in the first? It was for the good and comfort of the sheep to be brought back; but who called his neighbours together to *rejoice* with him? And in the next parable it was not the *money* that was made happy, but the woman who had lost it and found it.

The prodigal, no doubt, rejoiced to find such a welcome in his father's house, but it was the *father* who said, “It was meet that *we* should make merry, and be glad;” and it is *his* joy that is the whole point in the parable. And it is only just *like* God so to act. If it is “the exceeding riches of his grace” He is going to shew, nothing need surprise me. I may look for *any* thing from such a God. And still more if I look back to the cross. If I see the Son of God *there* in shame and humiliation, and know that God Himself gave Him to be there, I say *nothing* is too great to expect from Him. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not *with him* also freely give us all things!” The One who suffered so *must* “see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied;” and it will never be until I am with Him in the same glory!

Now this is the love of which you are the objects. Go about with the consciousness that you are “dear chil-

dren," and shew in the world your Father's character. Christ was the perfect manifestation of it — "God manifest in the flesh;" and I am to follow that. The Holy Ghost, in 1 John iii., makes the application in the strongest way—"Hereby perceive we the *love*, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." How entirely this is above what was required under the *law*! That was, I must love my neighbour *as myself*—taking my love to myself as the measure of love to others; but here I am called on to *give up self* entirely, after the pattern of what Christ did. If *all* kept the law, there would be no need for grace, and it would be a sort of paradise; but it is not so—all do *not* love me as much as they love themselves. Then I must have a love which will get above people *hating* me, and I see the pattern of it in Jesus. What carried Him through? He was perfect goodness in the midst of evil, whatever it might be. He "*gave him-*

self.” It was “to God” and “for us.” We were the occasion, by our sins, of this giving up of Himself; but none less than God was the *object* before Him in doing it. There is such a thing (so to speak) as loving upward and loving downward. In loving upward, the higher the object, the higher the affection. If I love a noble object, it is a noble affection. If I love God, it is a divine affection—and so on. In loving downward, the lower the object, the greater the kindness shewn in befriending it. Now *both* were in Christ. He came to do the will of God—to lay the ground for the accomplishment of the counsels of God. He acted in love to His Father, and in obedience to Him—it was “to God;” while, on the other hand, it is said, “He loved *us*, and gave himself *for us*.” And in principle I am called to follow Him in this—to give up myself in love to others, but making God my object in it all. It is “to God,” and *for* others.

Thus I am set, by the grace of God,

in heavenly places, and sent into the world to manifest what God is. We have seen it as to love, which God *is*; and then He is *light* too, and we are said here to be "light in the Lord," responsible to walk as such, having "no fellowship" with what is of darkness. And then Christ is the rule of both the one and the other. We have seen it with regard to *love*—now He says, "Christ shall give thee *light*." Here the believer is addressed as *asleep*; not as dead, but *among* the dead, and is called to awake, and *arise* from among the dead. A person asleep is no better, as to intelligence of what is around, and activity—no better than one dead. His faculties are all asleep—he may dream, but he is quite unconscious of anything going on around him. And so it may be with the believer spiritually as to his spiritual *senses*; and *is*, alas! with many. The world is going on to judgment, and *they* know nothing about it. But those who are "of the day" should know. Are you asleep in the world and

with the world—going on with it, as if it was all going right? The call is, “*Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from among the dead.*” Come out from the associations that bind you to the world, and take Christ for your rule and your light. The parable of the ten virgins teaches us a similar truth. The coming of the Bridegroom is forgotten—the very ones who started to meet Him forgot all about it—“slumbered and slept”—the wise as well as the foolish. And the cry that He was coming awoke them from sleep, *all* of them—only then they were separated by the search of the foolish ones after oil. And this is going on now. The coming of the Lord was the original hope of Christianity—-not some high-flown doctrine of some deeply-taught persons, but the simple expectation of converted souls, as soon as ever they turned from their idols to God. You see it in 1 Thessalonians i. ; they turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God, and *to wait for His* on

from heaven. This one and only proper *hope* of the believer was soon lost sight of, as the Lord in the parable shewed it would be. But the cry is that He *is* coming, and to awake from sleep. It is "high time" to awake out of sleep. "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from among the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Wake up, and you will have Christ Himself for your light.



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